Unit .20

Session .01

Jesus is Baptized

Scripture

Matthew 3:1-17

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in
the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, "Repent, because
the kingdom of heaven has come near!" **3** For he is
the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who
said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!
4 Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather
belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and
wild honey. **5** Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea,
and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to
him, **6** and they were baptized by him in the Jordan
River, confessing their sins. **7** When he saw many of
the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism,
he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you
to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Therefore produce
fruit consistent with repentance. **9** And don't presume
to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'
For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for
Abraham from these stones. **10** The ax is already at
the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't
produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into
the fire. **11** "I baptize you with water for repentance,
but the one who is coming after me is more powerful
than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He
himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
12 His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will
clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the
barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never
goes out." **13** Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at
the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14** But John tried
to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and
yet you come to me?" **15** Jesus answered him, "Allow
it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all
righteousness." Then John allowed him to be baptized.
16 When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately
from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for
him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a
dove and coming down on him. **17** And a voice from
heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am
well-pleased."

Intro Options

Main Point:
True repentance is necessary for the Christian life.

Option 1

Brainstorm with your students a list of famous people. They can be modern-day athletes or film stars, but they can also be fictional characters (like Optimus Prime or Katniss Everdeen) or historical figures (Winston Churchill or Amelia Earhart).

Next, put your students into groups of three. Randomly assign one of the famous people to each group. These three-person groups are the welcoming committee for your city. They are in charge of putting out a short radio advertisement or posting a billboard message for the people of your town. This advertisement should, in a sentence or two, tell the town how they should prepare for the arrival of this celebrity figure.

Give students some time to prepare their advertisements and then to share them with the group. What was consistent across all the messages? What changed based on the figure who was coming?

When Jesus was about to come, He sent John as His herald. John's short "get ready" message was for the people to repent and to believe and to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Option 2

For this activity, I'd suggest you have your students read the passage first, then begin this activity.

Your students should imagine they run a morning talk show or podcast in first-century Judea (yes, totally anachronistic). For this activity, they will be airing a segment the morning after John baptized Jesus.

Split your students into groups of five or six. They could have two people as anchors while the others will role play as either witnesses to the event or experts who will be interviewed by the anchors. The anchors can talk about what happened exactly, and the witnesses and experts can weigh in on analyzing the event. Roles might be a soldier who heard John speak, a Pharisee or scribe's analysis on the baptism, a Roman curator who couldn't care less, etc. Let the students be creative in what they come up with.

Give them a few minutes to prepare their segments and then "air" them. See what the students saw, thought, and came up with. Segue into discussing today's lesson's points.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 3:1-6.

In the Book of Matthew, John the Baptist was introduced as the forerunner to the Messiah. John was the messenger who prepared the way for Jesus, and John's message was one of repentance.

- **What is repentance, and why do you think John the Baptist emphasized the need for personal repentance?**

The meaning of the term repentance, which is the changing one's way of life as a result of a dramatic change in thought, raises the question: change our minds about what? We need to change how we view the kingdom, change how we see our sin, and change how we see God. The word repentance indicates a posture of willingness to change our perspective to align with that of the coming King. To prepare the way for the King, John is shining a light on an issue that needs to be addressed in order for people to be ready to receive Christ.

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

If the first aspect of repentance is changing our view, then we must recognize that changing our view comes with serious implications. Imagine that one morning you get dressed, put on your favorite outfit and head out the door. Once you get to your destination, you look in the mirror and realize your shirt has stains on it! The lighting in your house didn't show the spots, but now under this new light, you can see clearly that your shirt is dirty. And at this point, you are faced with two options. You can do something about the stains or you can ignore them. Repentance follows the same idea.

Once we see our sin clearly, we are at a crossroads. We have to do something with the information we now clearly see in the light. If our hearts are postured toward Christ, then the next place it leads us is confession. We see that at the end of this passage that the people were confessing their sins as they were being baptized in the Jordan River. Before we can move on to "doing" anything about the sins we now see, we must have the courage, humility, and willingness to confess them, to give voice to our fallen humanity, to bring the darkness into the light.

- **If confession is the bridge to accountability, why do you think it can be so hard for us to genuinely confess to someone?**

Read Matthew 3:7-12.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
True repentance is necessary for the Christian life.

Matthew 3

2. To best understand what John the Baptist's call to repentance means in this passage, let's take a look at the Greek word he used. As recorded, John used the word *metanoia*, which carries a central idea of changing one's mind as well as changing the way one lives. That meaning might be a little different from the way some people typically think about repentance. But John's listeners would have understood the intention of *metanoia* and recognized that John was issuing a call to change the way they saw things and consequently change their behavior as well.

4. John preached in the wilderness, so His lifestyle might seem strange. He dressed in camel hair and consumed a diet of locusts and honey. However, the most important feature of John the Baptist's ministry was not his strange clothing or diet, but his preoccupation with the message of repentance. John came from Elijah's place with Elijah's message (2 Kings 1:8). He was the prophet tasked with preparing the way for the Lord.

5-6. The people's response to John's message was tremendous (vv. 5-6). They flocked to John from Jerusalem and the whole region of Judea. Andrew was also one of John the Baptist's disciples, which means his influence had reached all the way north to Galilee.

7. A group of Pharisees and Sadducees were there beside the Jordan where John baptized. The Gospel of John indicated that these religious leaders were sent from Jerusalem to investigate John and ask him who he thought he was. Seeing them, John poured out a stream of prophetic words. He called them a "brood of vipers." This was a phrase that Jesus, John's cousin, would also use to describe the Pharisees (Matt. 12:34; 23:33).

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 48, DDG)

Baptism

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to the believer's faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

TEACHING PLAN

What is "fruit consistent with repentance"? A transformed life. Think about it this way. When someone tells you he or she is sorry but then absolutely changes nothing, do you believe them? No. Because you know that when someone is truly sorry, he or she will stop doing whatever it was that was harmful. We've probably all been in situations where we come to a place and say, "Look, don't just tell me you're sorry. Show me you're sorry." That's what the fruit of repentance demonstrates, a genuinely changed heart.

- **What are some areas in your life where you feel genuinely sorry yet you seem to sin regularly anyway? What are some measures you can take to repent more profoundly in these areas?**

However, even in the baptisms John oversaw, he recognized his limitations. He boldly told the people, and particularly the religious leaders of his day, "You identify with Abraham. It's not enough. Don't even identify with me. Identify with the One who will baptize with the very Spirit of God." John knew it wasn't a system of religious rules and regulations that would transform people but an encounter with the person and work of Christ that brings true life change.

- **Why wasn't it enough for the Pharisees to rely upon the faith of their fathers when it came to their own lives?**

John's sermon eventually shifted to the future and to Jesus (v. 11). At first, he compared the two of them—John baptized with water and Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Read Matthew 3:13-17.

At the baptism of Jesus we see a confirmation of His identity. John the Baptist, the first prophet Israel has had in more than four hundred years, confirmed that this is the Christ! Then, Jesus saw "the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him" (v. 16), confirming that He was the Messiah, the "anointed one." Finally, the audible voice of God declared that Jesus was, in fact, God's Son. Those who witnessed this occasion must have been in complete amazement—and probably confusion—about what they saw. After so many years of silence, so many years of waiting, here was God in the flesh; the anticipated Christ was finally here.

- **Why do you think it is important for us as Matthew's readers to see Jesus' ministry begin with a confirmation of His identity?**

Jesus took the calling of His Father upon Himself, a calling which would ultimately lead Him to the cross. The moment of baptism represented Jesus' acceptance of His calling, and it represented God's acceptance of His perfect Son. Jesus could have exercised His moral superiority over John the Baptist, instead He humbly submitted to His Father and was baptized, although He had never sinned.

In response, God spoke the words all children long to hear from their fathers. These were words Jesus needed to hear as He looked up and saw the wilderness He was about to enter. In essence, the Father said, "I love you" and "I am delighted in you." He confirmed Jesus' identity as His Son. His identity as God's Son was also the identity that Satan would immediately seek to attack and destroy in the wilderness, only a few miles away from the Jordan River.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
True repentance is necessary for the Christian life.

Matthew 3

11. In Judaism, ritual immersion was mandated before a person entered the temple area and on various other occasions. Baptism was an external symbol of an internal reality and was also used to initiate Gentiles into the Jewish community. Once other conditions were met, immersion symbolized being born into the Jewish community; one was said to be "born again."

John's baptism embraced all these images and more, but the fact that John baptized Jews was a sign that more was going on than initiation here. John was concerned about the heart of the person. A baptism of repentance was a unique innovation of John the Baptist.

14-15. John had just spoken about his inferiority to Jesus, so he protested baptizing Jesus. It should been the other way around, right?

Jesus' first words in the Gospel of Matthew are recorded in verse 15. A character's first words are significant in any book, and these words are no exception. Jesus told John that it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized for the purpose of fulfilling righteousness. What did Jesus mean? How did His submitting to a baptism of repentance fulfill righteousness? What did Jesus ever do wrong that He needed to repent?

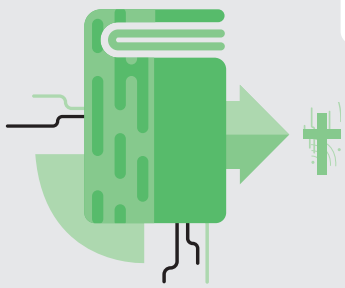
Activity

In groups or on their own, give students paper and drawing utensils and instruct them to create "The Beginner's Guide to Growing Fruit of Repentance." They should create an almanac-style short brochure or small book guiding the reader on the fruits that come with repentance and how to cultivate them. Let them get creative, but here are some ideas to help prime their creative pumps: they might have a section on what fruits might pop up in the garden of repentance (grapes of grace, cantaloupes of kindness, etc.); they could talk about what weeds to watch out for; they could point out that true fruit of repentance doesn't just feel sorry for its sin but actually grows toward the cross like regular plants grow toward the sun; they might talk about ways to harvest and prepare the fruit of repentance (taking kindness out of the garden and "harvesting" it into thank you notes to one's teachers or coaches, for example).

Give them some time to prepare their guides and then share them. Debrief by talking about how we can implement their ideas in our lives this week.

(p. 49, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus completely obeyed God and identified with sinners by being baptized like sinners are baptized. His baptism points to His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. For those of us in Christ, the words spoken over Jesus at His baptism are also true of us: we are the Father's beloved children with whom He is pleased.



JESUS IS BAPTIZED
True repentance is necessary for the Christian life.

JESUS CONNECTION
Jesus completely obeyed God and identified with sinners by being baptized like sinners were baptized. His baptism points to His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.

LIFEWISE QUALITY
WHOLEHEARTEDNESS – Complete dedication in everything I do.

HEAD
What did John the Baptist call God's people to do? What was their baptism a picture of?

Jesus chose to be baptized even though He lived a sinless life. Why?

HEART
The Bible is clear that God is perfectly holy. Even one sin is a serious offense against Him, which is why we desperately need a Savior. But that is often not how we think of our sins. What are some ways we are tempted to excuse or make light of sin in our lives?

When we sin, the Bible calls us to repent. The word *repent* means that, through the work of God's Spirit, we have a complete change of mind, we feel genuine sorrow over our sin and reject it, and we turn to pursue God's way wholeheartedly. What would it look like for you to turn completely away from an ongoing sin in your life to live God's way?

HANDS

Choose one option below:

1. Living wholeheartedly is not easy. Think of 1–2 areas (an activity, chores, homework, relationships, etc.) where you are tempted to live half-heartedly or do the bare minimum instead of giving your all. For each area, write down what it would look like for you to be more wholehearted this week. Then, ask God to help you be wholehearted in this area and choose to follow through with it.

2. Write down something that you struggle with that the Bible points out as sin. What does the Bible say you should replace this sin with? Why? Confess your sin to God and ask for His help to turn away from sin and live God's way instead. Write down at least two ways that you can wholeheartedly walk after God in this area instead of walking toward sin.

   Example:
   - **My sin:** Treating others unkindly.
   - **Replacing sin with:** kindness in what I do and say.
   - **Why:** Because Jesus has treated me kindly.
   - **How:** I will ask God's Spirit to give me the power to be kind, I will memorize Ephesians 4:32 to remind myself to be kind, I will choose to treat others the way I want to be treated.

   - My sin:

   - Replacing sin with:

   - Why:

   - How: